

market under check, the Central Government has banned export of sugar upto 31.03.2007, *vide* Notification No. 18 dated 04.07.2006 issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The question of permitting the private traders to export sugar can be considered only when the ban on export of sugar is relaxed or lifted.

Arresting the rising prices of essential commodities

305. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL:
SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that food items like wheat and pulses have been becoming costly everyday;

(b) if so, what are the specific reasons for price rise which has been hitting hard the common people;

(c) whether Government have taken any action to arrest the rising trend of prices of essential commodities and also ensure the proper supply of the food items to consumers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the result achieved therefrom?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI TASLIMUDDIN): (a) and (b) Government are aware of the increase in the prices of certain food items such as wheat and pulses during the past several months. The reasons for rise in prices of wheat and pulses are shortfall in domestic supplies relative to demand and hardening of international prices.

(c) and (d) Government has taken the following steps to check the rise in prices and to augment the overall supply of wheat, pulses and edible oils:

(i) State Trading Corporation has already contracted for import of 55 lakh tonnes of wheat to supplement domestic availability, of which 22.65 lakh tonnes of wheat have been received by FCI till 20.11.06.

- (ii) Private trade has been permitted to import wheat at zero duty from 9th September 2006. The customs duty was earlier reduced to 5 per cent on June 27, 2006.
- (iii) Customs duty on import of pulses was reduced to zero on June 8, 2006 and a ban was imposed on export of pulses with effect from June 27, 2006.
- (iv) At the initiative of the Government, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) executed a contract for import of 49,300 MTs of pulses, of which 48,061 MT, comprising 35,168 of urad and 12,893 MT of moong have been shipped.
- (v) Duty on palm group of oils was reduced by 10 percentage points in August, 2006.

As a result of the action taken by the Government, prices of certain varieties of pulses and sugar have declined in different centres over the past few weeks. However, prices of wheat have increased at several centres over the same period.

Increasing procurement of wheat

306. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that major wheat producing countries like Australia, Ukraine, USA and China are going to have heavy short fall in the production of wheat; and

(b) if so, whether Government are planning to ensure early and high levels of procurement so that there would be no need to import wheat in 2006-07?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (DR. AKHILESH PRASAD SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) In order to procure sufficient quantity of wheat to meet the requirements of Targetted Public Distribution System and Welfare Schemes, Minimum Support Price for wheat during the Rabi Marketing